

**Title:**

Metaphorical analogies in an online discussion forum for relationship abuse survivors: “*That analogy really works for me*”

**Abstract:**

When people undergo traumatic events, they frequently turn to metaphor in an attempt to make what might initially seem indescribable into something comprehensible to others, and/or to help themselves reach a clearer understanding of what has happened to them (see e.g. Demjén, 2016; Kövecses, 2000; Semino et al., 2015). This investigation explores such metaphorical language produced in a publically available online discussion forum by survivors of relationship abuse to communicate about various aspects of their experience. The forum allows survivors of relationship abuse to start and/or respond to threads about their ongoing or past experience in an abusive relationship. The relationships discussed involve a love partner, family members, colleagues, and/or platonic friends. The threads comprise a corpus of 44.6 million words produced over a six-year period.

The specific linguistic focus here consists of the metaphorical analogies overtly flagged by use of the lexeme ANALOGY, used by such survivors when discussing their abuse experience: roughly 500 extended metaphors in all. All such identified metaphorical analogies were assigned brief ‘labels’ summarizing their contents, which were then semantically annotated using the Wmatrix corpus analysis and comparison tool to identify their underlying metaphorical frames (see e.g. Musolff, 2016; Semino & Demjén, 2016 for discussion of frames and scenarios). The particular scenario in any given frame were then fleshed out to fill in the correspondences between the various elements expressed in the analogy and the various elements in the abuse experience, along with any overall message.

Finally, the analysis discusses the ways in which survivors negotiate and develop metaphorical scenarios and frames among themselves in their forum discussions. More specifically, investigation into the co-text of the identified analogies allows for evaluation into how survivors react to, accept, expand, and/or reject the metaphorical comparisons advanced by members of the discourse community. The findings from this research contribute towards a greater understanding of the experience of relationship survivors, validating their perceptions, needs and feelings as universal, rather than limited to the ‘exaggerations’ of a selected few.

**References**

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